DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 062 892 FL 003 236

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TITLE	Performance Objectives--Can They Serve Teachers?
INSTITUTION	Georgia State Univ., Atlanta.
PUB DATE	72
NOTE	4p.
JOURNAL CIT	Foreign Language Beacon; v7 n3 p29-32 Spr 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavioral Objectives; Curriculum Development; Educational Accountability; *Educational Objectives; Failure Factors; Instructional Program Divisions; *Language Instruction; *Modern Languages; *Performance Criteria; Performance Specifications; Standards; Student Evaluation; Success Factors; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the nature of performance objectives is summarized in this way: "they state (1) what the student will do, (2) under what conditions, (3) to what level of mastery, and (4) using what time limit (if any)." Having established the importance of performance objectives for modern language teachers, the author suggests their specific possible uses. It is urged that teachers write their own performance objectives and develop student evaluation procedures along lines suggested by sample materials. Performance objectives help the teacher in self-evaluation, provide a good basis for curriculum reform, serve as a basis for program articulation, facilitate material and textbook selection, render teacher and supervisor evaluation more objective, and assist in making budgetary allotments. (Author/RL)

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Special Section

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES— CAN THEY SERVE TEACHERS?

Teachers have always set lofty goals for their students. Now performance objectives may identify more clearly the immediate steps in the process of reaching those goals, assuring students and teachers alike that measurable progress is made.

By Dr. Florence Steiner
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The purpose of this article is to answer certain basic questions about performance objectives so that teachers may judge whether or not objectives will help them to improve their teaching. Our pedagogical literature is full of references to this movement, and unless one has time to research the various articles, one can become thoroughly confused with the opinions expressed. Let's consider certain basic questions:

What are performance objectives?

They are statements of what the student will be able to do (perform) at the end of a class period, a unit, or a course. They are measurable; that is, they can be evaluated. They are stated in terms of what the **student** will do, not in terms of what the teacher will do. They provide the expected level of performance. They state under what conditions the student will perform. They give a time limit if any such limit is pertinent.

Let me give an example. At the end of an initial presentation of regular-**er** verbs in French, the student will be able to answer **orally** questions such as "Parlez-vous francais?" by affirmative statements in the first person singular (Oui, je parle francais).

It would be for the teacher to determine the number of verbs the student could use (perhaps five), the amount of accuracy he should expect (four out of five correct), whether or not the student could look at the book, whether or not hints would appear on the board. These expectations or level of performance would vary with the amount of time spent, the maturity, previous language experience, the interest and the ability of the students in the class.

This same objective would not necessarily be appropriate for the student who had spent four weeks studying this structure. But once again one would have to consider the age, interests, ability, time devoted to learning, and logical expectations of the students involved.

To sum up, a performance objective states:

1) what the student will do
2) under what conditions
3) to what level of mastery
4) using what time limit (if any)

What is the difference between performance objectives and behavioral objectives?

Most authors use the terms synonymously since a change in behavior is necessary to produce performance. The proponents of performance objectives insist that the performance be measurable and observable.

Are performance objectives the same as curricular goals?

Not necessarily. Curricular goals are often broad and lofty. They state what the teacher hopes will take place at some time, some place. They may or may not be measurable, and they may or may not occur in the teacher's presence or even in the teacher's lifetime. All courses should be guided by these lofty goals, but these should not be confused with performance objectives.

To give an example: The student will appreciate the culture of Mexico. No one can dispute that this is a worthy goal nor that it should be part of most Spanish programs. Nevertheless, one can only measure appreciation if it is demonstrated. It is difficult to look into the heart of another person. We can, however, ask ourselves how we can provoke this appreciation in students. Do they appreciate that which they do not know? If not, we can construct some objectives that in our opinion will help provoke this appreciation.

For example: The student will give an oral report to the class on dating customs in Mexico. We cannot be sure that this will provoke appreciation; but if we believe that the more a person knows, the more he is likely to appreciate, then we are structuring that which we can control to provoke that which cannot be controlled.

Are performance objectives old or new?

Some authors hail them as a new remedy to age-old problems while others trace with pride the fact that they stem from the ideas of Ralph Tyler and others. Some criticize them as the latest fad or bandwagon that will certainly pass and be forgotten while others denounce them as dragons of the past that are once more rearing their ugly heads.

It seems safe to say that the movement towards performance objectives

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is relatively new or "recycled" for those of us currently teaching. Most "new" ideas have appeared in one form or another throughout the centuries, however.

Do performance objectives have to be measured by multiple-choice tests?

Absolutely not. They should be measured any way you wish—by essay, by recitation, by group discussion, by question and answer. The only point of importance is that the student know in advance what the measurement will be.

Does the student need to know how he will be graded?

Obviously, otherwise he will not know how much studying is indicated. We need to know some things (how to land an airplane) with close to 100% accuracy. Other matters can be handled at lower levels of accuracy.

Does that imply that you could have a different standard for each performance objective?

Yes, since the level of mastery depends upon what the student needs to do with what he has learned. What would constitute suitable mastery at one level might not be acceptable at another level.

How do students react to performance objectives?

I have noticed that students are happiest in a class when they understand what they are doing and when they see some reason for doing it. I also have noticed that students consider important those ideas and items that are found on tests or that through some other means of evaluation count towards their grade.

This is at times discouraging to teachers who want students to enjoy the course for its own intrinsic merits. Nevertheless, I found that if I told my students at the start of a unit what was important, what would be on the tests or would be otherwise evaluated, if my classroom activities revolved around these points, then most students would do the work willingly and most of them would get good grades on tests. I also noticed that

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when they received good grades they tended to like the subject and tended to enroll in the next level.

What happened to my first class that used performance objectives is recorded in an article of **Foreign Language Annals** (May, 1970). Grades rose, attitudes changed, and the class had been good before we ever began.

What that article did not record, because I had not yet reached that point, was how the whole process changed my thinking. I saw what I had left out of my teaching. I became conscious of what I was testing. I saw the difference between what I was saying and what I was doing.

Why should teachers write performance objectives?

I once asked a principal this very question. I thought I had always operated my classes somewhat under the principle of performance objectives, and I saw no reason to do all that work. His answer was as follows:

"It might be interesting to see what you really consider important, what you have been asking students to do. Does it add up with the way you feel languages should be taught? Are you asking the right things of your students? Do they like what you are asking them to do? Is it good for them? Is this the best you can give them? Besides, if you wrote them down and if they are as good as you and I (euphemism on his part) think they are, they will help others. Who knows, you might even convince some non-believers."

Once I had decided what I felt students should achieve at the end of a unit, I began to try to define what they should be able to do at the end of a course. Then I talked to my colleagues. They did not agree on every point. We began to argue; then we began to work together.

A commonality of purpose emerged. We also saw that if we could spell out what the student should achieve, some of them could go ahead without waiting for the group; others could do it if they had time, if they did not have to keep up with the group.

What specific advice would you give a person who is writing objectives for the first time?

Begin with a **unit** you will teach this year. Give yourself at least three weeks to write the objectives. Choose a unit that you have taught before or choose material that you know well. Ask yourself, "After my students have finished this unit, what should they be able to do that they could not do before the unit?"

Begin by listing the content you expect them to control: the vocabulary, verbs, grammatical structures. Next list the skills you expect them to demonstrate at the end of this unit: **write** a dictée, **answer** ten questions orally, **recite** a dialog, **present** a skit, **give** an oral report, **rewrite** sentences from the present to the preterite, **write** a one-paragraph composition, **imitate** the pronunciation.

Notice that all the verbs are action verbs and all are measurable. Not one is "read," "know," "learn," "study." These verbs denote action of a kind, but you can measure them only by asking a student to **answer** questions, **rewrite** sentences, **summarize** or recite. Your performance objectives should contain only measurable action verbs.

Grading Patterns

Next, ask yourself what percentage of each area the student must achieve to receive a **C**? Use your normal grading patterns.

Will time be a factor? If so, indicate it. Will students hear a dictée twice? Once? With pauses each time? Indicate this.

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Now write your objectives; begin with

1. The student will (during a 40-minute test)
   a. Rewrite 15 sentences from present to preterite (regular verbs only).
   b. Write a one-paragraph guided composition in the preterite tense. Material will be taken from the dialogs.
   c. Read a passage in Spanish based upon the material contained in this unit and answer 15 multiple-choice questions.
2. Now set your standards:
   a. For **a** above, how many should he write correctly?
      Twelve out of fifteen? Ten out of fifteen?
   b. For **b**, how many mistakes can he make and yet receive a C? Three? Five? Imagine you are grading the composition.
   c. How many questions does the student need to answer correctly for a C? Thirteen? Eight?

Not all objectives are written—Consider

The student will:

   d. In a three-minute conference with the teacher, answer five oral questions based upon reading material.
   Criterion: Four out of five correct in content; no more than four errors in pronunciation.
   e. Recite one of the three dialogs with another student: no notes will be used (in a five-minute period with another student). Criterion: Two errors in content; four errors in pronunciation.

Your standards of expectancy may be quite different; you may not wish to have students recite dialogs. This is up to you. What you **should** do, however, is to make clear to your students what you do expect.

Give the objectives to the students at the start of the unit. Then help the students reach the objectives. Provide self-tests and check-out points.

After you give the exam, ask the students to evaluate your objectives. Write down their suggestions. Use them in writing the next unit.

Teach one unit via objectives, then teach the next one the usual way. This gives you time to write, time to prepare and time to think. If you write two or three units per year, you will make progress.

In what ways have performance objectives affected your teaching?

First of all, I was surprised at what I had been doing in my classes and what I had been asking of my students. I began to modify my expectations as I saw that only a small percentage of the students actually achieved the objectives. I then began to teach for mastery. Setting my expectations down on paper caused me to revise them. I decided some were too low, and I raised them; I found that others were too high, and I lowered them. I found important omissions in my teaching.

Does every teacher need to write performance objectives for every class he teaches?

Absolutely not. It is advisable for teachers to work in teams, and no teacher ought to work on more than one subject or level at a time. The objectives should be discussed with other teachers (and with students) to determine whether they are relevant and feasible.

Objectives serve as a good means for articulation between one level and the next, for instead of arguing about materials or approaches one can discuss student performance, namely, what do we want the kids to be able to do? Choices of texts and techniques of teaching fall into place more appropriately then.

For what can performance objectives be used?

The following represent only a few uses:

1. Performance objectives help a teacher see what he is really doing; they serve as a "written" videotape or mirror.
2. Performance objectives provide a good basis for curriculum revision.
3. Performance objectives serve as a basis for articulation among various levels of instruction.

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Dr. Florence Steiner distributes ACTFL buttons to the Illinois membership.

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Dr. Florence Steiner, one of the national leaders in foreign language education today, has focused particularly on the area of performance objectives in teaching for the past several years.

She served as a consultant to the ACTFL symposium on performance objectives for the 1971 convention in Chicago. She has written in **Annals, Modern Language Journal,** and other FL publications in addition to speaking at professional meetings throughout the country.

Dr. Steiner co-authored **Son et Sens,** published this year by Scott Foresman & Company. She also wrote the chapter "Behavioral Objectives and Evaluation" for the 1970 **Britannica Review of Foreign Language Education.**

A Florida State University graduate, Dr. Steiner continued her studies, obtaining the M.A. from the University of Illinois and the Ph.D. in Romance Languages from Northwestern University.

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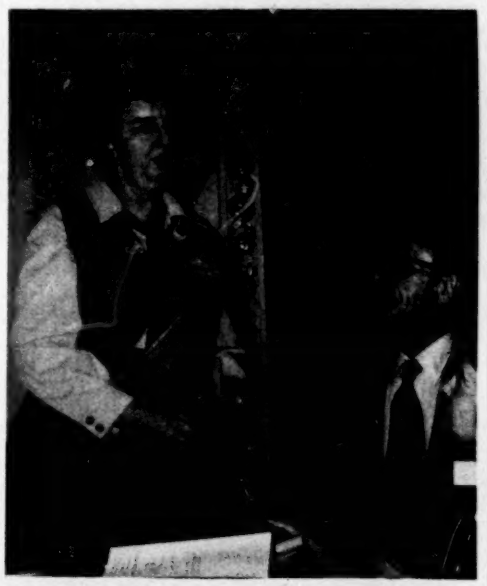
4. Performance objectives serve as a basis for choosing textbooks and other resources.
5. Performance objectives can be used more broadly in teacher and supervisor evaluation. Teachers are then measured in terms of what **they do**. These objectives should obviously be stated in teacher terms. Example: Does the teacher utilize a wide variety of learning activities in the classroom?
6. Performance objectives can be used in making budgetary allotments. One assigns monies on the basis of the objectives to be achieved. You may have seen references to PPBS, which means "Planned Program Budgeting System."

When did you first find time to write performance objectives?



Colleagues come up to congratulate Dr. Florence Steiner on her speech.

The same time I am finding to write this article—at home, at night, when I could be watching television or sewing! But I found reward in the process.

It even carried over into my personal life, for my 17-year-old daughter announced last Sunday, "Today my performance objectives are: 1) to finish writing my English paper, 2) to clean my room, 3) to get Dad to raise my allowance, and 4) to borrow your car for the day."

I knew I was licked when she achieved all of them, especially when I had to walk home from church.